

# *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

by Steven Canny & John Nicholson



*It is, of course, a **trifle**,  
but there is nothing so  
important as **trifles**.*

- Sherlock Holmes

## Fortune School Resource



# *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

By Steven Canny & John Nicholson  
Directed by Patrick Davies

Fortune Theatre proudly presents ***The Hound of the Baskervilles***, a new farce where NOTHING is elementary. This zany, slapstick spoof follows three members of a theatre troupe haplessly trying to put on their version of this well-known classic against all odds. Gothic thrills and uproarious mayhem ensue when Sherlock Holmes and his trusty sidekick Watson attempt to unravel the ancient curse of the Baskerville family before the Hound claims its next victim.

Many thanks to our wonderful Fortune School Ambassadors for their insight and contributions.

Please contact us with any thoughts, questions and feedback at [education@fortunetheatre.co.nz](mailto:education@fortunetheatre.co.nz)

Shannon Colbert  
Education Liaison

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# Author's Note

Hello to you, Dunedin based theatre goer, Thanks very much for coming to see our show. We wrote it 8 years ago and have been rewriting it ever since. That might seem like your idea of hell but, to us, it's been a constant pleasure. We wrote it with the express intention of making people laugh and it's a huge surprise and delight that 11,852 miles away from us (thanks Google maps) people will be gathering together to do just that. At least we hope you'll be laughing. Comedy is a tricky business.

We owe huge thanks to Arthur Conan Doyle - he was an ardent believer in Spiritualism so we're thanking him just in case he was on to something - and we're even more indebted to the performers - Patrick, Nick and Simon. You'll see that this play demands a lot of them. Hopefully they've been keeping themselves fit. You'll spot it if they haven't.

Most of all, thanks to you. Comedy is a very sad affair if no one turns up to laugh.

- **Steven Canny**



## John Nicholson

John Nicholson is an English actor who co-founded the fringe company, Peepolykus [pronounced: people like us], in 1994 with Jarvier Marzan and David Sant. The focus of their work is visual slapstick and anarchic verbal humour built around absurd scenarios. The British Council has toured them internationally and they have now played seasons in twenty countries.

John was the writer on the Peepolykus productions *No Man's Land* (1995), *Squid* (1996), *Let the Donkey Go* (1997), *I am a Coffee* (1998), *Goose Night* (2002) and *Mindbender* (2003). For the fringe comedy company, The Big State, he wrote *Firestarter* (2000), *Fetch* (2004) and *Fallen Angels* (2007). The Oxford Pegasus premiered *Sanity Clause* (1999), *The Pied Piper* (1999) and *Illusions* (2003). He wrote *The Sick Room* for the

National Youth Theatre in 2008, *Richard's Rampage* for the Kevin Spacey Foundation in 2011 and his *Rude Mechanicals of Rumsbury* was seen at the Royal National Theatre in 1999. This year he has written for BBC Radio A *Tresspasser's Guide to the Classics*.

He can be seen in the films *Dear General* and *Not Waving but Drowning*, and in BBC-TV comedy series such as *Comedy Nation*, *Stop the World, Rumbled*, *All Aboard with Supergirly*, *Dave*, *Comedy Shuffle* and *The Wrong Door*. He was recently in the ITV comedy series, *Benidorm*.



## Steven Canny

Steven was the Associate Director from 1999 to 2004 of leading English fringe company, Theatre de Complicite, working on its productions of *Measure for Measure*, *Mnemonic*, *The Noise of Time and Light*. He was also Associate Director on the 2002 off-Broadway production of Brecht's Hitler parody, *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*, which starred Al Pacino in the title role.

He then became an Executive Producer in the Comedy Department of the BBC, winning Sony Gold Drama Awards for his productions of *Mr Larkin's Awkward Day* (2009) and *People Snogging in Public Places* (2010). For radio he has adapted such plays as *Humble Boy*, *Mnemonic*, *A Shropshire Lad* and *The Virtuous Burglar*. In 2013 he was appointed Executive Producer in the Comedy Department of BBC Scotland.

## Collaboration

Steven and John have collaborated as writers on a number of productions for Peepolykus. They include *Spyski, a.k.a. The Importance of Being Honest* (2009), *No Wise Men* (2010) and *The Arthur Conan Doyle Appreciation Society* (2012). They have also written together for the National Youth Theatre (*Foot / Mouth*, 2008), *Pentabus (Origins)*, 2009) and BBC Radio 4 (*Marley was Dead*, 2010).

Their adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was written for Peepolykus and was premiered by the company at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds in 2007. Following a successful season there it was transferred by commercial producers into the Duchess Theatre in London's West End where it enjoyed a ten week run. It has since been broadcast on BBC Radio in 2012 and

had more than 50 productions worldwide, proving particularly popular in American regional theatres. Its New Zealand premiere was in April last year at The Court Theatre in Christchurch and it has subsequently been staged at Palmerston North's Centrepont Theatre.

## Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle

Doyle was born in Edinburgh in 1859. His father was an alcoholic of Irish Catholic descent. He was educated by Jesuits in Scotland and Austria before entering the Medical School at the University of Edinburgh. He graduated with an MB, ChB, later completed an MD and undertook postgraduate studies in his specialist field, ophthalmology, in Vienna. He began writing stories while a student (the first being published in 1879). He wrote four novels (*A Study in Scarlet*, *The Sign*

*of the Four*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *The Valley of Fear*) and many short stories featuring Sherlock Holmes. In addition he wrote historical fiction and a second series of nine novels featuring the character Professor Challenger (the best known being *The Lost World*). His works for the theatre included *The Speckled Band* and, with J. M. Barrie, the libretto for the opera *Jane Annie* (however, the best known Sherlock Holmes play, staged at the Fortune in 1979 and simply titled *Sherlock Holmes*, is not by him). He played ten 1st class matches for the Marylebone Cricket Club and took the wicket of W.G. Grace. Having served as a medic in the Boer War, he subsequently published essays justifying it. He was also active in seeking reform in the Congo and was a prominent promoter of spiritualism, visiting New Zealand in 1920 to speak about it (appearing in



Sir Arthur in the garden at work with his dog.



Dunedin at His Majesty's Theatre, now Sammy's nightclub, in Crawford Street). Two closed criminal cases were re-opened as a result of his advocacy. Doyle died of a heart attack in 1930.

## *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

This is the third of the four novels that feature Sherlock Holmes. It was serialised in the *Strand* magazine between August 1901 and April 1902. Its setting predates that of the 1893 Holmes story, *The Final Problem*, in which Holmes appeared to have died but the Hound's popularity with readers resulted in Doyle reviving the character. It is thought that Doyle was aware of both Devonshire and Welsh legends involving a hound. There are at least nine British film or television versions, five made in Germany, four in America plus Russian, Indian, Japanese and Australian versions.

Alister McDonald

Fortune Theatre  
Dramaturg

## *A Note from the Artistic Director*

It worked for *The 39 Steps*, *Travels with*

*My Aunt* and now it is Sherlock's turn. He is so hot right now! With multiple adaptations of his work hitting small and large screens worldwide we thought we'd jump on the band wagon, and what better way to hurtle into the second half of the year than with three actors endeavouring to perform all 16 roles from Conan Doyle's original masterpiece.

If that wasn't enough, the auteur that is Patrick Davies sees him juggling not only multiple character roles, but directing the production as well.

As this adaptation was bred from an improvising troupe, it is key to cast actors with strong improvisational skills. Nick, Simon and Patrick are loaded with these. There is precision in their mayhem, physical comedy genius abound and a constant piling of pace as they gallop through familiar territory. Nick, as Sherlock, gives McKellan, Cumberbatch and Downey Jr a run for their money while joined by Simon, as

Holmes, and Patrick, as everyone else, in their attempt to solve the curse plaguing the Baskerville family.

Sincere thanks to them, and the rest of the creative crew, who have taken ownership of the material and made us feel like we're watching this marvelous romp for the very first time.

All you have to do is sit back, shake off the winter blues, and enjoy this crazy ride through the Grimpen Mire.

Lara Macgregor  
Artistic Director  
Fortune Theatre



## Director's note

It's not every day you're asked to direct and act in the same show and when Lara first suggested the idea I was quite reluctant. Apart from what some people might think, (as I usually do when I hear of this combination), my first thought was – how? 'Hounds' is a great script, very similar to *The 39 Steps* which is one of my favourite types of shows to perform – part clown, part comedy, part madcap mayhem and totally entertaining. It's also great fun to direct – in the rehearsal room with marvelous performers, uncovering the funniest way to present comedy is always delightful fun and loads of laughs on the way. In doing both jobs, how was I to compartmentalise my brain, so as not to let the director get in the way too much when I'm on stage, and to be most help to the actors while shaping the gags, the scenes and the production?

I'm not sure if I've answered that question, as every show I've acted in, and certainly every show I've directed, has required different approaches. What I do know is that I could never have attempted it without all of the other participants in this production. The designers and backstage crew here are a huge credit to the Fortune, jumping on the

bandwagon of craziness that's going on, while always providing wonderful solutions to the many challenges we've faced. Lara has given unflagging support as a sounding board, as well as popping into rehearsals and providing great feedback on the process, while allowing me freedom to run mad.

In particular there are three people who have been extraordinary. First up my Mum, who has been my no.1 fan and watches as I get up at sparrow's fart and wander back in later to fall asleep whilst every now and then pushing food in my mouth. And, of course, Nick Dunbar and Simon Leary: I would not have taken this on board without their support which was immediate and full-hearted. I do wonder if they still feel that way...

I've had a truly blessed plate of productions to present at the Fortune and am extremely proud to present *The Hound of the Baskervilles* to you. Sit back, buckle up and enjoy.

**Patrick Davies**





## Hounds in Rehearsal

Patrick Davies not only has to keep track of his seven characters, he is also directing the show. Something, Patrick said, he has never done before and may never do again. However, he felt ready to take on the challenge with the support of Lara Macgregor, and the Fortune designers and crew and, particularly, because he already had a strong working relationship with the other two actors.

Patrick said this led to a very collaborative rehearsal room, where everyone was ready to put forward ideas. He said directing the show felt like a conversation.

Patrick said he needed actors with great improv, clowning and physical comedy skills. All three actors have extensive experience with this kind of theatre and are well suited to this show, which was originally devised through improvisation.

Some of the original script had to be changed to make sense for this production. The original actor playing Holmes, for example, was Spanish and some of the dialogue was written to accommodate that. The



actors in each production use their own names and play a version of themselves in the moments when they break the 4<sup>th</sup> wall and talk to the audience. Improv skills also helped to adapt those parts of the script for these particular actors in Dunedin. For example, in the original, the reason for only using three actors is purely financial, while this production has used the fact that there is another adaption of *The Hound of Baskervilles* opening on the same night at Circa Theatre in Wellington to explain the missing actors.

Patrick said there have been times in rehearsal when he has forgotten his character while using his director brain and times when he is meant to be stepping back to direct, when he is thinking about his character, but for the most part the director/actor combination has worked well and the rehearsal process has been a fun and collaborative, creative effort.



Patrick isn't the only one to have trouble keeping his characters straight. Nick Dunbar says he focuses on the very different and heightened physicality of each of his characters to quickly switch from one to the other.

As it is such a technical play they started working with the actual costumes and props in the rehearsal room, as soon as they were available and sound and lightening effects were read out by stage manager, George Wallace. Much of the rehearsal was spent on transitions and costume changes.

In the final week of rehearsal the cast were all ready to work with an audience. "The audience is the final cast member" said Nick Dunbar. "We have been having great fun reacting off each other, but we can't wait for that missing element - the audience."



## Elements of style

So to which style of theatre does *The Hound of the Baskervilles* belong? It is certainly farce and definitely spoof or parody, but there is a lot of theatre history running through this play. There are elements of pantomime, melodrama, Comedia dell'arte, music hall, silent film, improvisation and clowning. Here is a quick look at some of these styles.

The Oxford Dictionary defines **Farce** as: “a comic dramatic work using buffoonery and horseplay and typically including crude characterization and ludicrously improbable situations.”

This is *The Hound of the Baskervilles*- right down to the horse. Other characteristics of farce include slapstick, physical humour and word-play (just try and count the puns and innuendos that come flying past).

**Parody or Spoof** refers to a work of art that imitates the style of a particular artist, genre or time period with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect. This play spoofs Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories in particular and Gothic mysteries, supernatural thrillers in general and Victorian England in passing. It also spoofs actors and theatre itself.

**Melodrama** is characterized by dramatic action, sensational plots and performances full of heightened emotions and exaggerated physicality.

There are some wonderful moments of melodrama in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* which complement the thrilling and Gothic nature of the original story.

There are also many characteristics of **pantomime**, such as topical and local jokes, talking to the audience, cross-dressing, slapstick and physical comedy, lots of set and costume changes and actors playing multiple roles, including stock characters. There are close links here to **improvisation** and **clowning** and the slapstick, heightened physicality and stereotyped characters take us all the way back to the elements of **comedia dell'arte**.

Here are some more terms to think about when talking about style.

**Verisimilitude** is the truthfulness or believability of a work of fiction. The word comes from the Latin *verum* meaning truth and *similis* meaning similar. Most plays require verisimilitude so the audience can believe what they are seeing and hearing. For example, when a prop gun was used in Fortune's recent production of *Punk Rock* – great pains were taken to make the gun as disturbingly real as possible. To keep the audience believing in the shocking climax of the play, it had to feel real. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles* quite the opposite is called for. Watson's ridiculous torch gun and impossible gun sound effects are strictly for laughs and serve to remind the audience

once again that this has nothing to do with reality.

**The willing suspension of disbelief** happens when an audience agrees to forget they are watching a play and accept the reality of the story and characters they are watching. In this play our suspension of disbelief is constantly being challenged, by a purposeful disregard for verisimilitude and the constant reminder that we are watching actors in a play.

**The 4<sup>th</sup> Wall** refers to a proscenium stage with 3 real walls and one imaginary 4<sup>th</sup> wall invisible to the audience. When actors talk directly to the audience or refer to the fact that they are actors in a play it is called breaking the 4<sup>th</sup> wall. The actors in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* break the 4<sup>th</sup> wall with gay abandon. Most of it is scripted as when Nick Dunbar harangues the audience after interval, incensed by a tweet sent by the fictional audience member, Barbara69, and insists that they repeat the entire first act or when Nick notes the sausages are fake. Every time an actor gives a look to the audience, silently commenting on what is happening on stage, this is also breaking the 4<sup>th</sup> wall. Many of these moments are improved or added by the actors rather than scripted and can change each night depending on the audience.

Whatever you like to call it, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* borrows from many styles of theatre ancient and modern.



# Set Design

Watson notes in chapter six of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, "behind the peaceful and sunlit countryside there rose ever, dark against the evening sky, the long, gloomy curve of the moor, broken by the jagged and sinister hills."

Dartmoor, with its treacherous mires, eerie fogs and strange tors (towering granite outcroppings), makes the perfect setting for a thrilling supernatural mystery. In this production the book's famous Cleft Tor and Grimpen Mire are built up by road cases or over-sized trunks and suitcases. They have been painted in earthy browns and greys to suggest the bleakness of the moor. Peter King said he wanted the cases to be a reference to travelling theatre troupes. This is even more appropriate as after the Dunedin run, the production is touring Southland and Otago. It is also practical. All the costumes and props will be packed inside the set pieces when they are on the road.

Director, Patrick Davies



*"From its craggy summit, I looked out myself across the melancholy downs."*

said he wanted tour audiences to have the same experience as those seeing the show at the Fortune. This versatile set was designed to travel easily and to work in nine very different venues.

The set is framed at the top with a moody overcast sky cut out to create the silhouette of a rocky moorland, over black curtains to hide the dressers and the racks of costumes and props. There is no time to leave the stage for these costume changes.

Patrick Davies has noted that the script is very film like, in that the action moves quickly from one location to another. Easy on film but much more demanding on stage. The key function of the set, then, is to switch locations in a moment, without a lengthy set change. The characters race back and forth from Baker St to Dartmoor, to Baskerville Manor, to the moor,

Grimpen Mire, the Stapleton's home and many spots along the way. The set helps us to identify where we are just as the costumes help us to keep track of all the characters.

One set device that quickly and easily changes the location is a **periaktos**. A periaktos (from the Greek word revolving) is a triangular prism column on rollers that can be turned to show a different scene on each face. While periaktos were a Greek invention first mentioned in 14 BC, they gained popularity in the Renaissance in the 1500's in Italy and the 1600's in England. This periaktos has one side showing a Baker St wall with hooks for coats and hats. Another side shows Baskerville Hall with a portrait of Patrick as a Baskerville and the third side is the stormy grey of the moor.



*Peter King Paints the periaktos*

This periaktos has a removable panel to create a cave for Nick Dunbar's

Stinky Hermit on the misty moor side, while on another side the portrait of Patrick as a Baskerville slides down to reveal the real man. This portrait has a removable frame which allows Patrick to pop out of the periaktos and become a whole picture gallery of Baskervilles (with the help of his fabulously rubbery facial expressions).

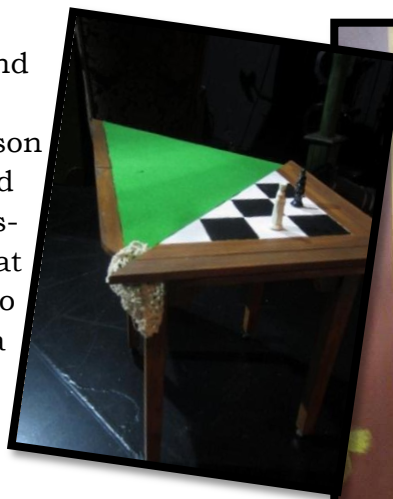
Another important scene switching set piece is the large trunk which becomes a small fire place in the Baker St flat, a grand fire place in Baskerville Hall, part of Grimpen mire and a seat in first a London steam room, then a Hansom-cab and thirdly a train compartment.

Just like the costumes and props the set pieces are also built for laughs and gags. As well as the improbable trunk with pop up fire places and seats, there is the sign at Dartmoor Station, the blanket and sheet that turn into a bed when held up to the actors chins, the hand held window frame through which Mrs Barrymore signals with her

candle and Holmes and Watson climb and the chess-board that unfolds to become a snooker table.

These comical transitions also remind us that we are watching three harried actors, desperately trying to get through the show against all odds. However ridiculous or imperfect they appear, the set and costume changes must work smoothly even in the moments when they are supposed to look like mistakes. But if something doesn't go as planned, the three actors are backed up with some brilliant improv skills.

Some of the Fortune Ambassadors saw the first run-through on the main stage with almost all the props and costumes - it was a great opportunity to see how technically demanding the show is (as well as the comedy the



*Stage Manager George Wallace, behind the portrait in the periaktos.*

actors made of each technical slip-up.)

During the last week of rehearsal all the technical elements come together and last minute changes are made. Once the lights hit the set, the black stage seemed to make the set pieces float. So Peter grounded the set with a painted floor that starts as floor boards downstage and transitions into the swirling, swampy mire in brown, grey, green and orange upstage.

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Periaktos>)



*Fortune School Ambassadors Lani, Hannah, Jamie and Sam sit in front of an almost complete set. (left) An early draft of the set on Google Sketch-up. (above)*



# Lighting and Sound

Lighting and sound provide some wonderful moments of melodrama and spoofed up Gothic horror. The opening sequence with the dramatic light on Sir Charles Baskerville, the swirling dry ice/fog and the chilling howl of the hound, establish right away the Gothic nature of the story and the spoofy nature of this adaption.

Just like the actors and the set pieces, lighting and sound break the 4th wall and throw verisimilitude out the window, too. For example, when the actors ask the operator, Anna Vandebosch, to bring up the house lights or with many comic moments like this:

**Stapleton:** ...*But be careful, the night falls quickly on the moor. (exits)*  
**Watson:** *Thank you, but I think we'll manage to get there before then. (Immediate fade to night)*  
**Henry:** *Watson have you got a torch?*

Another hilarious moment is when Sherlock and Watson think they are seeing Sir Henry's Ghost. The lights suddenly dim and pools of dramatic light focus on the actors faces highlighting their marvellously exaggerated slow motion reactions. Lighting designer, Stephen Kilroy said he wanted to use lights on the side of the stage for a sculptural effect

to accentuate the actors' wonderful physicality.

The lights placed on the stage facing upwards, like foot lights, cast wonderful shadows on the actors' faces and the little moorland bushes on the road-cases make ominous shadowy shapes. Stephen said he went back to old Sherlock Holmes films to spoof those lighting effects and create some fabulously thrilling and moody atmosphere using a lot of under lighting and dramatic shadows across the actors' faces.

Anna the operator has over 350 light and sound cues. Sound and light work beautifully together for laughs and to ground the off the wall comedy in some sort of reality. For example, during the journey to Dartmoor, there is a series of black outs and lights up to reveal several

hilarious tableaux of Watson and Sir Henry's train trip (complete with Nick's train conductor and crazy cat lady). These tableaux are given a sense of reality by the sound of the train going through a tunnel each time there is a blackout.

Like the other designers, sound designer Matt Morgan is very aware of the balance between paying tribute to the true Gothic horror and thrilling suspense of the original and the over-the-top nature of this farcical spoof. He said he loved being able to play with the Gothic horror genre while remembering that the end result is laughter rather than chills down the spine.

Matt wanted the sound to feel like it is coming through the action so has speakers on stage hidden in crates on the road cases.

Light and sound relish in the over-the-top theatricality of this ripping yarn of a play.



## The Sounds of the Baskervilles

A list of sounds used once or multiple times during the show.

- |     |       |  |     |                                    |     |   |
|-----|-------|--|-----|------------------------------------|-----|---|
| 1.  | 1     | ominous music                          | 20. | Train traveling                    | 51. | Reboot as above but faster                      |
| 2.  | 1     | wind                                   | 21. | Train in tunnel                    | 52. | Hounds attacking snarling                       |
| 3.  |       | moor/night                             | 22. | Country background                 | 53. | Space 1999                                      |
| 4.  |       | iron gate                              | 23. | 16 Prison siren                    | 54. | Moor day into Baskerville theme into Moor night |
| 5.  |       | howl                                   | 24. | Train stopping                     | 55. | Various uncooperative horse                     |
| 6.  |       | hound gallop                           | 25. | Doors slamming                     | 56. | Horse escape                                    |
| 7.  |       | iron gate shaking                      | 26. | Horse neighing                     | 57. | Harp  |
| 8.  |       | hound onstage growling about to pounce | 27. | Windier country                    | 58. | Rooster   |
| 9.  | 1     | hound runs off                         | 28. | Night noises                       | 59. | Outdoors as in the yokel scene                  |
| 10. | 4     | HOT Theme music                        | 29. | Hound in distance                  | 60. | Lamb  |
| 11. | 4     | 2-3 Transition into Sherlock Theme     | 30. | Baskerville Hall Theme             | 61. | Ticking Grandfather clock                       |
| 12. | 6     | Wind howl 2                            | 31. | Ominous Echoey footsteps           | 62. | Various snooker                                 |
| 13. | 7     | Moor/night                             | 32. | Gong                               | 63. | Snooker balls pocket                            |
| 14. | 10    | 3-4 Sherlock violin into steam room    | 33. | Moor day                           | 64. | Moor night                                      |
| 15. | 10-12 | Steam puffs                            | 34. | Lamb Bleat                         | 65. | Hound howl 6                                    |
| 16. | 12    | 5-6 London Street scene                | 35. | Hound Howl                         | 66. | Howl 7 h  |
| 17. | 12    | horse hooves on cobble then off        | 36. | Bird /shot                         | 67. | Howl 8  |
| 18. | 15    | 6-7 Sherlock theme                     | 37. | Sheep shot                         | 68. | Ominous music                                   |
| 19. | 16    | Train whistle                          | 38. | Pig shot                           | 69. | Hound rears                                     |
|     |       |  | 39. | Cat x 9 shot                       | 70. | Gunshot   |
|     |       |  | 40. | Elephant shot                      | 71. | Hound yelping                                   |
|     |       |  | 41. | Hound Howl 3                       | 72. | Hound snarling                                  |
|     |       |  | 42. | Baskerville hall theme             | 73. | 2 gun shots slow mo. 3 <sup>rd</sup> real time  |
|     |       |  | 43. | Creaking footsteps                 | 74. | music stabs                                     |
|     |       |  | 44. | Moor night                         | 75. | tango   |
|     |       |  | 45. | Howl 4                             | 76. | tango becomes violin                            |
|     |       |  | 46. | Howl 5                             | 77. | post show                                       |
|     |       |  | 47. | Ominous music                      |     |   |
|     |       |  | 48. | Snarling in the immediate vicinity |     |   |
|     |       |  | 49. | Huge dramatic sting                |     |   |
|     |       |  | 50. | Interval Music                     |     |   |



*The sound of snooker balls adds an odd reality to the snooker room scene, Sherlock's 1860's newspaper is made with yellow paper so it doesn't glare under the lights and Nick Dunbar as Stapleton emerges from the gloom into an eerie light.*



# Costumes and Props

Maryanne Wright-Smyth's costumes are both marvellously rich period pieces and over-the-top stereotypes. As well as having a lot of comedic value, the costumes need to help the audience quickly identify the many different characters an actor plays.

As well as being distinctive, each costume needs to be built to get on and off at lightning speed. For example, Sir Henry's trousers which mysteriously vanish as he walks behind the fireplace or Nick Dunbar's miraculous transformation from Cecille in an exotic purple dress, wig and hat to Stapleton complete with his identifying eye patch, cravat, coat and crutch in just 5 short lines:

**Watson:** *Dear Holmes there's a strange and exotic...*

**Nick as Cecille:** *Go back, go back.... (exits)*

**Watson:** *Well there was.*

**Henry:** *Wait come back. (They enter mire)*

**Watson:** *I think you're sinking*

**Nick as himself:** *Already?*

**Watson:** *I'm afraid so,*

**Nick as Stapleton**

*(enters): Stop. Don't move if you value your life.*



Three hat and wig combos for Nick Dunbar.



There are many iconic costume pieces and props to help identify the characters. Sherlock, of course, is instantly recognisable by his deerstalker cap, his Inverness cape, his curved meerschaum pipe and magnifying glass - not to mention the smoking jacket and violin. (Some of you may recognise costume designer, Maryanne Wright-Smyth's gorgeous red smoking jacket from last year's production of *The Caretaker* where it provided quite a different effect).

Holmes is also famous for being a master of disguise. This is spoofed up in this adaption when Watson is completely unable to recognise him



Iconic Sherlock Holmes

when he is disguised as the Stinky Hermit, the Little Girl and the Vicar. It is also a chance for some hilarious costumes. Some of the costumes are simply sight gags, like the lady hat and selection of shawls holding what looks like a taxidermied cat and kitten. A lot of work went into this costume which on the train who appears between Holmes and Sir Henry in her crazy wig, gets approximately 3 seconds of stage time - but it also gets a big laugh.



Stage manager and dresser George Wallace collects Sherlock's smoking jacket from wardrobe



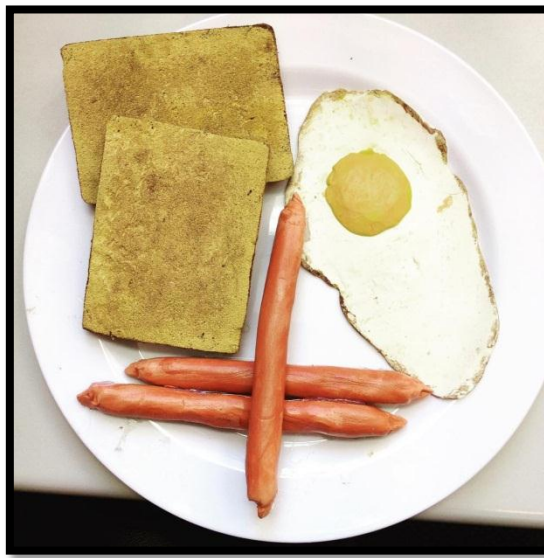
Props go straight for the laughs too. They make no attempt at verisimilitude and go for the 4th wall busting gags. For example, when Sherlock - suddenly breaks into actor Nick to tell Watson/Simon that the plate with a towering pile of sausages topped by an extremely fake poached egg are just props:

**Watson** (hungry and put out): Did Barrymore give you that?

**Holmes:** Yes, Stapleton is our target all right. We must get one step ahead of him... (while Holmes is talking Watson is drooling over the plate off sausages and trying to steal a bite from the one Holmes is waving about on his fork – comedy and innuendo ensue.) What are you doing?

**Watson:** Can I not just have a bit of sausage?

**Holmes:** No forget about the



sausage.

**Watson:** Please. Just a bite off the end?

**Holmes/Nick:** (annoyed): They're not real! They're stuck to the plate! Have you not got the concept yet! Oh you've ruined it now! (He gives up on the illusion holding the plate upside down by the strap glued to the bottom of the plate). This is the only real one. (He eats the one on his fork, slowly and tauntingly).

There are many other comedic prop moments, like the sheer ridiculousness of the



*Breakfast and a GI Joe performing the role of the Hound's victim.*

torch gun, Barrymore's absurd beard and when a GI Joe doll, attached to a sick and dressed in a miniature Sir Henry costume, is slowly somersaulted off the road-case tor by a dresser turned puppeteer. The doll's descent is so slow that it pauses while Sherlock and Holmes have to take a breath during their dramatic cry "Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooo - ooooooooooooooooooooo".

Props and costumes are purposefully theatrical and add to the fun, humour and mayhem of the show!



*Nick Dunbar as Yokel revealing a comedic sign (above) and as Holmes with the fake sausages and Simon Leary as Watson*



**Do you have what it takes to be a dresser?** The actors could not pull off the near impossible costume changes without a dresser – or two - standing in the wings with costumes and props at the ready. Keep your eyes peeled for their helping hands appearing from the wings or behind a puppet falling to its death from the tor. Dresser, Jordan Dickson and Stage Manager, George Wallace are kept on their toes.

Stage Left	Stage Right
	(P) Charles > Mortimer + Briefcase
	(P) Mortimer > Sauna towel – shoe + Letter + Bucket/Ladle
(N) Dinner Jacket > Sherlock Cape	
	Hand (N) + (S) Towels
	(P) Sauna > Cabbie
Hand (P) 2704 sign as he passes	
	(P) Cabbie > Sir Henry + Suitcases + Ticket
Hand (N) Station Guard Hat	
(N) Guard > Old Lady	
(N) Old Lady > Guard	
	(S) + (P) > Yokels (Both Dressers SR)
(N) Guard > Yokel	
	(S) + (P) Yokels > Watson + Sir Henry
(N) Yokel > Cecille	
(N) Cecille > Stapleton	
	(N) Stapleton > Barrymore + Feast + Lantern
(P) to Night Gown + Pants	
Grab (S) off stage	
(S) to Half Night gown	Hand (N) Breakfast
Hold Candle out of wings	
	(N) Barrymore > Mrs Barrymore pt1
	(N) Mrs Barrymore pt1 > pt2
	(N) > Full Mrs Barrymore (Move Barrymore SL)
	(N) Mrs Barrymore > Cecille
	(N) Cecille > Stapleton + Hat
(N) Stapleton > Hermit + Holmes Pipe	
(N) Hermit > Barrymore	
	Hand (N) Drinks Tray
(N) Barrymore > Mrs Barrymore + Window + Candle	
(N) Mrs Barrymore > Full Sherlock + Hermit on top	
Puppet on a stick fall from tor.	
<b>INTERVAL INTERVAL INTERVAL</b>	<b>INTERVAL INTERVAL INTERVAL</b>
	Hand (S) Hat with small gun in it
	Hand (P) Cane
Hand (P) Towel	
	(N) Dinner Jacket > Full Sherlock
	Hand (P) Suitcases
Hand (N) Guard hat + Knitting + Ticket	
	Hand (N) Yokel
	Hand (N) Yokel hats
(N) > Stapleton + Cecille Hat + Fan	
	(N) Stapleton > Barrymore + Feast + Lantern (Move Stapleton SL)
	Take feast + Lantern
	Hand (N) Breakfast + Blanket
(N) Barrymore > Full Cecille	
(N) Cecille > Stapleton	

	Hand (P) Hermit
(N) Hermit/Stapleton > Barrymore +Window + Candle	
(N) Barrymore > Full Sherlock + Hermit inside out on top	
Throw Henry puppet.	
(N) Sherlock > Stapleton	
(N) Stapleton > Cecille	
(N) Cecille > Sherlock (Dinner Jacket) +Sausage plate	
	(P) Sir Henry > Yokel + Lamb in a bag
	(N) Sherlock > Little girls disguise
	Hand (P) Bonsai Bovine
	(N) Little girl disguise > Vicar
	(P) Yokel > Wise Yokel
(P) Wise Yokel > Sir Henry + Coat	
(N) Vicar > Sherlock	
	(N) Sherlock > Cecille
	(N) Cecille > Sherlock
(N) Sherlock > Cecille	
	(N) Cecille > Stapleton
High Five from wings	
	Hand (N) Cecille Dummy
	(N) Stapleton > Sherlock
	(N) Sherlock > Stapleton
(N) Stapleton > Cecille	
	(N) Cecille > Sherlock + Violin





# The Origins of the Legend

In 1901 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle returned from the war in South Africa with enteric fever. To recuperate took a golfing holiday with his friend the journalist Bertram Fletcher Robinson to Cromer in Norfolk.

During their visit, Sir Arthur and Robinson had dinner with Benjamin Bond Cabbell at Cromer Hall. Over dinner Cabbell told them about his ancestor, Richard Cabbell - Lord of Brook Manor and Buckfastleigh - who had been killed by a devilish dog. The story went that Richard Cabbell, a 17th-century squire, suspected his wife of infidelity and attacked her in a jealous rage. When she fled across the moor with her faithful hound, Cabbell gave chase and eventually killed her. Still by its mistress' side, the hound then turned on him and ripped out his throat before dying itself of the squire's knife wounds. The ghost of the dog was said to haunt Dartmoor and to reappear to each generation of the Cabbell family. Many believe that Richard Cabbell was the model for the evil Hugo Baskerville.

Conan Doyle's description of Baskerville Hall bears an uncanny likeness to Cromer Hall:

*"The avenue opened into a broad expanse of turf, and the house lay before us. In the fading light I could see that the centre was a heavy block of building*

*from which a porch projected. The whole front was draped in ivy, with a patch clipped bare here and there where a window or a coat-of-arms broke through the dark veil. From this central block rose the twin towers, ancient, crenelated, and pierced with many loopholes. To right and left of the turrets were more modern wings of black granite. A dull light shone through heavy mullioned windows, and from the high chimneys which rose from the steep, high-angled roof there sprang a single black column of smoke."*

It is believed Bertram Fletcher Robinson also told Holmes about Black Shuck, a phantom dog as big as a calf, with eyes that bled fire, which was said to haunt the Norfolk countryside. Legend has it that anyone who looks into the eyes of the hound has a year to live. But those weren't the only dogs about the moor. Other legends told of howling black hounds unleashed on the moor upon Cabbell's death in 1677, the Whist Hounds, a howling pack of gigantic, red-eyed dogs said to stalk the moors with the devil and the Black Dog of Dartmoor, an enormous hound with flaming eyes that chased unsuspecting late-night travellers. Unlike his famous character,

Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur did believe in the supernatural and was very intrigued by ghost stories and legends.

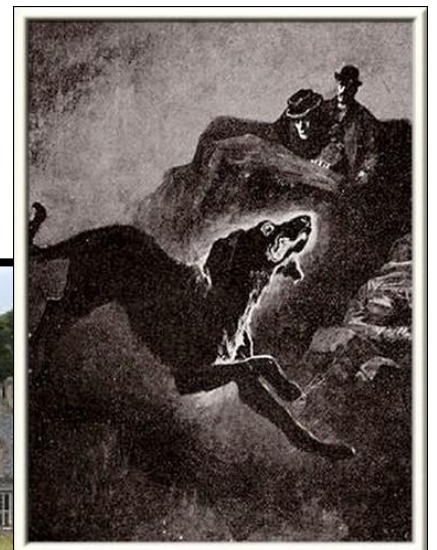
Sir Arthur then accompanied Robinson to his family home in Dartmoor. Some scholars believe that Robinson acted not only as Conan Doyle's tour guide but also helped him write the tale. What is certain is that the two men hiked for miles over the empty moors with Robinson's coachman, a Harry Baskerville, as their guide. Young Harry is believed to be one of two inspirations for the novel's Henry Baskerville, the other being a Baskerville family living on the Welsh border whom Sir Arthur had visited in 1897. The family had intermarried with a neighbouring clan, the Vaughans, who owned a legendary huge, black dog.

[https://www.flickr.com/photos/cameron\\_self/2835766912/in/photostream/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/cameron_self/2835766912/in/photostream/)

[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/hound/ei\\_moor.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/hound/ei_moor.html)

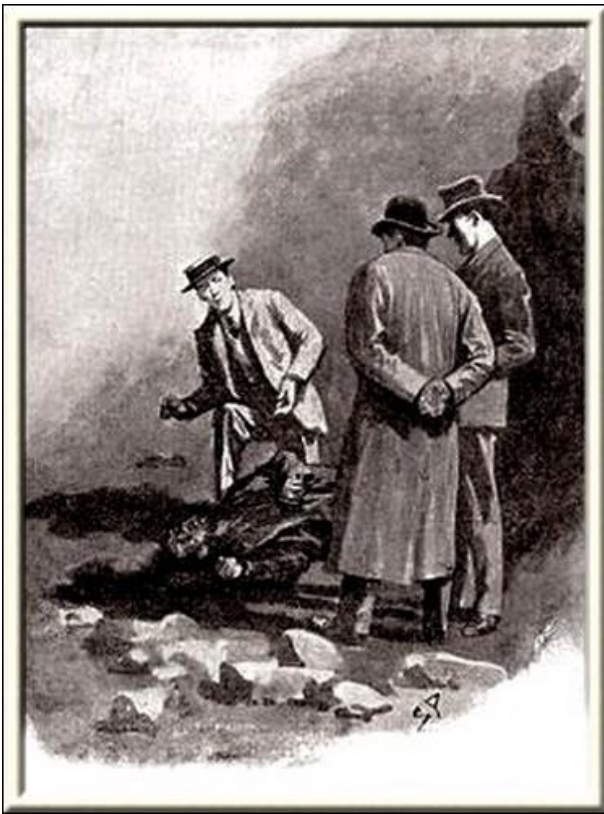


*Cromer Hall possibly the model for Baskerville Hall*



## Honouring the Original

Although untold liberties have been taken, this spoofed up version still follows much of the original story. Here are some examples for a page to stage comparison.



*"Why, Dr. Watson, that's not you, is it? You are the last man that I should have expected to see out on the moor at this time of night. But, dear me, what's this? Somebody hurt? Not—don't tell me that it is our friend Sir Henry!" He hurried past me and stooped over the dead man. I heard a sharp intake of his breath and the cigar fell from his fingers. "Who—who's this?" he stammered.*

*"It is Selden, the man who escaped from Princetown." Stapleton turned a ghastly face upon us, but by a supreme effort he had overcome his amazement and his disappointment. He looked sharply from Holmes to me. "Dear me! What a very shocking affair! How did he die?"*

*"He appears to have broken his neck by falling over these rocks. My friend and I were strolling on the moor when we heard a cry."*

*"I heard a cry also. That was what brought me out. I was uneasy about Sir Henry."*

*"Why about Sir Henry in particular?" I could not help asking.*

*"Because I had suggested that he should come over. When he did not come I was surprised, and I naturally became alarmed for his safety when I heard cries upon the moor."*



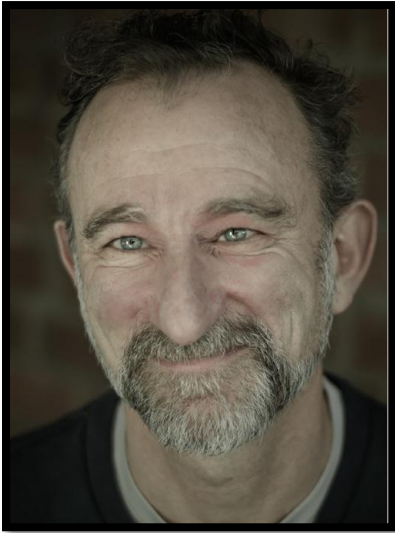
*From amid a tuft of cotton grass which bore it up out of the slime some dark thing was projecting. Holmes sank to his waist as he stepped from the path to seize it, and had we not been there to drag him out he could never have set his foot upon firm land again. "It is worth a mud bath," said he. "It is our friend Sir Henry's missing boot."*



*"Good heavens!" I cried, in amazement. The face of Stapleton had sprung out of the canvas.*



## Meet the cast



### Patrick Davies

Director and Sir Charles Baskerville, Sir Henry Baskerville, Mortimer, Cabbie, Yokel 2, Wise Yokel

Patrick Davies is an award-winning international director and improviser who grew up in Dunedin and has since worked around New Zealand and overseas.

In Dunedin, Patrick has directed *Collected Stories*, *Eleanor*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *The Great Macbeth Project*. In 2006 he relocated to Wellington to begin his Master of Theatre Arts (Directing) at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School and Victoria University. During this time he directed many small projects and some major ones including Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* and Stoppard's *After Magritte*. He also took Mueller's *Quartett* to Germany and the UK and presented the work at INFANT Festival in Novi Sad, Serbia. The following year he returned with more work and teaching, adding Romania to the list. In 2008 he directed the highly acclaimed *Glorious* (Richard Huber) which subsequently toured to Wellington and Auckland. He teaches Shakespeare

Performance at the National Youth Drama School in Havelock North and each year spends two months in Colorado as a visiting artist with outdoor theatre company GALSCO. For Fortune Theatre he directed *The Pitmen Painters* (Best Male Performance; Best Design; Best Director; Production of the Year) and has also been nominated for Best Director for *The Tutor*, *Two Fish 'N' A Scoop* and for last year's *Peninsula* which won Production of the Year. He directed the successful season of *The Slapdash Assassin* at the Basement Theatre in Auckland before heading to Colorado to direct *Romeo and Juliet*.

Patrick's first acting role was as Second-Soldier-to-the-Left in the Globe Theatre's production of *Richard III* while still at school. He went on to cut his teeth in a number of local productions including *Romeo & Juliet*, *Unidentified Human Remains* and *the True Nature of Love*, *Miss Julie*, *Arcadia*, *Cherish* and *One Flesh*. He made his Fortune debut in *Aunt Daisy* and since has performed many times on the stage including *The Graduate*, *Things We Do For Love*, *Noises Off*, *Travels With My Aunt*, *Take a Chance on Me*, *A Country Wife*, *Hamlet*, *Lend Me a Tenor*, *The Wind in*

*the Willows*, *Equus*, *Alarms and Excursions*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Shortcut to Happiness* and, of course, *The 39 Steps*.

He won acclaim for his portrayal of James K Baxter in *Jerusalem, Jerusalem* which toured New Zealand, Ireland and was presented at the Edinburgh Festival. For the past three years he has performed in Steamboat Springs Colorado in the outdoor Piknik Theatre seasons of *Twelfth Night*, *Tartuffe*, *The Winter's Tale* and *Botanica*. Since arriving back in New Zealand last August he has appeared on National Radio's *Tale of the Redundant Miner*, *Out of Frame* and *A Fragile Peace*; and also at Circa Theatre in *The Pitmen Painters*, *Red Riding Hood* and *A Servant of Two Masters*. He can currently be seen on the big screen in *I Survived A Zombie Apocalypse*, and after 'Hounds' will be off to Centrepont Theatre to perform in *The Boys at the Beach*.





**Nick Dunbar**

*Holmes, Stapleton, Cecille Stapleton, Mr Barrymore, Mrs Barrymore, Yokel 3*

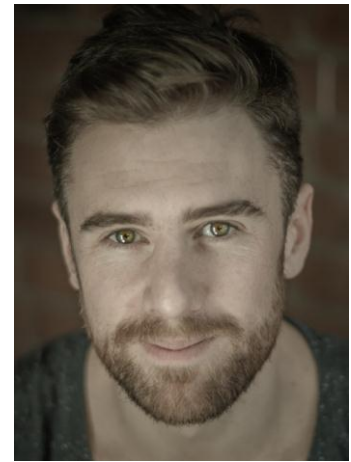
Nick trained at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School, graduating in 2003 following a BA degree in German, Modern Lit. and Film, and a DipGrad in Theatre Studies from Otago University. Originally from Dunedin, Nick has worked extensively in theatre, television, film and radio throughout New Zealand, and currently resides in Auckland.



In 2004, he appeared in *Up For Grabs* at Downstage Theatre, and was nominated for Best Supporting Actor at the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards. Nick has also appeared at Downstage in *Big River, Who Needs Sleep Anyway?, Turbine, Live At Six!, The Spy Who Wouldn't Die Again* and *Le Sud*, at Circa Theatre in *Jacques Brel Is Alive And Well And Living In Paris, Drinking Games, Aladdin* and *Mary Stuart*, at Bats in *Never Swim Alone, Jeff Koons, Metamorphosis, Turbine, Lonely Heart* and *Christ Almighty*, and at the 2006 NZ International Arts Festival in *King And Country*. Nick was nominated for Best Supporting Actor at the 2006 New Zealand TV and Film Awards for his role in the television series *Insiders Guide To Love*. Other appearances include *Penumbra* for the AK07 festival, The NBR New Zealand Opera's productions *Lucia Di Lammermoor* and *La Boheme*, the 2008 NZ International Arts

Festival's production of *The Trial Of The Cannibal Dog*, and roles in the feature films *Show Of Hands, Aftershock* and *Until Proven Innocent*.

Recent credits include *Ivy* for the Awesome Festival in Perth, *Romeo and Juliet* for The Piknik Festival in Colorado, *Peninsula* at Fortune Theatre, *Super City 2* and *Shortland Street*.



**Simon Leary**

*Watson, Yokel 1*

Simon was born and bred in Timaru. He graduated from Otago University with a BA in Theatre Studies in 2007 before training at Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School. Since graduating





with two arts degrees and racking up exorbitant amounts of debt, Simon has acted in productions in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Palmerston North and Dunedin.

Simon's most recent works include: *A Servant to Two Masters*, *Red Riding Hood* and *The Pitmen Painters* at Circa Theatre, *The War Artist* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* at Centrepont. Other theatre credits include: *All Your Wants and Needs Fulfilled Forever* (Playground collective), *A Show about Superheroes* (My Accomplice), *Mates and Lovers* (Downstage, Fortune) and *Chekhov in Hell* (Circa).

Simon has written and performed as a voice artist for Radio New Zealand in such productions as *You Me Now*, *My Brother's War* (David Hill), and *Exit Stage Left*.

Simon won "Most Promising Male Newcomer" at the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards for his performance in *Mates and Lovers* and directed *Pupil Zero* which got runner up for Best Theatre at Dunedin Fringe Festival, 2015.

TV credits include *War News* and *Hilary* - an upcoming biopic series about the life of Sir Edmond Hilary.





# Reviews

**Cheerful, High-spirited  
Absurdity  
Theatre review  
10 Aug 2015  
By Terry MacTavish,**

First, a reassurance (just as the programme reassures patrons that only a few hounds were harmed): despite the obvious temptation there will be no dog puns in this review.

Extraordinary, isn't it, the continued fascination exerted over our imaginations by Conan Doyle's great fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes. There have been literally hundreds of plays and movies based both on Holmes' cases and the man himself, most recently Ian McKellan's sober portrait of his declining years. This deliciously irreverent spoof concocted by a talented pair of English actor-writers, can therefore trade on our prior knowledge of the sleuth of Baker Street, and indeed of this particular case.

*The Hound of the Baskervilles* is probably the most popular of all the tales, involving as it does, the terrifying spectre of a gigantic hell hound, straight from the dark legend of a noble family, hunting down its victims across a dangerous moor. "That which is clearly known has less terror than that which is



hinted at and guessed", so what could be more fearful than the supernatural? The Fortune's sound and lighting team (designers Matthew Morgan and Stephen Kilroy, operator Anna Vandenbosch) have exploited this universal dread in a marvellously spine-chilling opening, with ferocious snarls and howls of a ghostly hound emanating from ominous shadows as we witness the horrifying death of Sir Charles Baskerville.

From here the high melodrama descends abruptly to the deliberately prosaic, as three actors briskly demolish the fourth wall to confide their dilemma to the traumatised audience. The rest of the

cast (of amazing diversity, we're told) have failed to show up, so after a hurried colloquy, of which we catch snatches like 'opportunity of a lifetime' and 'executive decision', the trio determine the show must go on: they will play all the parts themselves.

This cunning conceit may not be original (I recall Michael Green's opera where the cast must sing with only the benefit of Conductor and Lady Triangle) but it works a treat. Not only do the actors have the opportunity to show their versatility by undertaking all 17 roles, creating massive hilarity in the audience as they duck and dive between costumes, wigs and accents, but in the play



outside the play, they establish and build on a very funny, usually competitive relationship.

The dynamic is perfect, and the chief delight of this engaging show is that the actors clearly enjoy the mad romp as much as the audience does. One of the actors is director Patrick Davies himself, which means he can (and does) pull rank, but the others show plenty of spirit and he doesn't get away with much. Davies is an outstanding director with a vast amount of experience, but it is always a test to direct and perform in the same play. Multiple role-playing is a speciality of his, however, as was evident in his direction of award-winning production *Peninsula* and his performance in *The 39 Steps*, so it is really no surprise that Davies rises superbly to the challenge.

His chief role is Sir Henry Baskerville, the heir of Sir Charles and therefore the next threatened by the ancient curse of the Baskervilles. His scenes with Holmes and Dr Watson initiate the plotline, but also offer opportunities for some terrific farce, like the ludicrous visit to the steam baths.

All three actors are miraculously deft as they dart about the stage, contorting their bodies into incredible positions for our viewing pleasure. Watch for

the great crossing the moor scene, one actor wielding a crutch! The high point though, has to be the brilliantly contrived opening to the second half, when, enraged by a disparaging tweet 'posted during interval', Nick Dunbar insists on rerunning the whole first half at breakneck speed. It takes about eight minutes, and is an absolute tour-de-force.

It is Dunbar – like Davies a versatile and indeed flexible actor, with too many credits to mention (except for the never-to-be-forgotten Dog in *Peninsula*!) – who tackles the role of Holmes. He is certainly well-cast, with finely sculptured profile and haunting eyes, not unlike Jeremy Brett, actually. There's not much chance to show the darker side of Holmes but Dunbar

endows Holmes with an imposing austerity, and his superior attitude to poor Watson, who invariably fails to penetrate his disguise or anticipate his deductions, is beautifully judged, and always amusing. Dunbar also revels in playing, amazingly, both halves of two couples: bearded butler Barrymore and his lachrymose wife, as well as sinister Stapleton and his 'sister' the ravishing Cecile.

Simon Leary, once Chapman Tripp's Most Promising Newcomer, is now a seasoned professional and his performance, like those of his fellow actors, is skilful and perfectly assured. He is especially charming as an often bewildered Dr Watson, the audience rocking with laughter at his lively bout of fisticuffs, or





The costumes by Maryanne Wright-Smyth are ingeniously devised to look sumptuous but be easily whipped on and off, from the luscious red smoking jacket Holmes wears to the elaborate, fashionable dress and picture hat of Cecille. I am glad we are given a rare chance to applaud the stage management team, who must be exhausted. Here's hoping dressers George Wallace and Jordan Dickson maintain their sanity throughout the run.

the running gag of his unsuccessful pursuit of glasses of whisky and plates of sausages. All three performers are admirably physically fit and share an easy rapport that is crucial to this genre of theatre.

The beauty of the 'theatrical emergency' conceit is that the players can get away with every sort of gaffe, whether carefully rehearsed or unintentional. The audience loves the odd 'ow!' as an actor rushes into place during the black-out for a swift scene-change, and the cast members are skilled improvisers, well able to cover for any late entrances as characters transform in the wings, only to rush on with Velcro still flapping or the wrong wig.

The Fortune, doubtless aware it is onto a winner, has made this a longer season than usual, and the production will then set off on tour round Otago and Southland. With this in mind, Peter King has designed a set which, while creating the right ambience and appearing substantial, is presumably easily portable. Baker St, for instance, is simply a screen, a high-backed chair, and a chest which proves to have a remarkable ability to transform into a sauna, a railway carriage, a fireplace, or the murky quagmires of the moor. The various comical stage properties, from maltreated corpses to the tempting sausages, created by Monique Webster, add to the fun.

The timing of all this cheerful, high-spirited absurdity is very welcome. We have just been seared by the utterly stunning *Punk Rock*, next up in the Fortune's programme is a play dealing with the scars of war in the Middle East, and it is snowing tonight. The theatre owes us an uncomplicated belly-laugh.

"It's absolutely hilarious," school students at the preview asserted, but what will my guest, an experienced actor recently returned from checking out London's theatre scene, think of it? Apparently local theatre measures up. She is positively glowing: "I enjoyed every single minute of it!"

Aspiring young actors spotted in the audience are also waxing lyrical. Clearly, while this is an easy play for anyone to enjoy, the craft of the performers lifts it into the realm of a masterclass in truly excellent physical comedy. In fact, I would suggest that it would be a simple step for this talented crew to cut out the middle men next time (clever as Nicholson and Canny are), and adapt a story themselves. They are surely equal to it.

In the meantime, Otago and Southland are jolly fortunate that a touring production of this standard is venturing out to spread uncomplicated joy in the depths of winter.



Spoof good, barmy fun  
thanks to great skill

Otago Daily Times,  
Mon, 10 Aug 2015  
By Barbara Frame

The new play at the Fortune is a spectacular spoof on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's still-popular novel of the same name.

Written by Steven Canny and John Nicholson, it features Holmes, Watson and plenty of Conan Doyle mystery.

Staging challenges posed by plot elements such as train journeys, foggy moors and ghastly howling are ingeniously turned to comic advantage, and the play is to some extent self-reflexive - the three actors' primary roles are those of three actors barely coping with the task of presenting a

demanding play with minimal resources.

Sometimes they address the audience directly, harangue them about cellphone usage and, at the beginning of the second act, subject everyone to a hilariously condensed version of everything that's happened so far, just in case anyone isn't quite up to speed.

Broad caricatures, anachronisms such as texting and intentional costume deficiencies, including the worst fake beard you've ever seen, add to the sense of melodrama.

To produce this multilayered effect while telling a convoluted story with multiple characters and keeping everyone laughing takes enormous skill, and Patrick Davies (who has somehow also managed to direct this madness), Nick Dunbar and Simon Leary display the speed, agility, precise timing, lightning costume changes and comic expertise needed to rescue the tale from the ever-present threat of crashing disaster.

A clever set featuring versatile pieces that can be adapted to outdoor and indoor settings (Peter King and Richard Clark), splendid costuming (Maryanne Wright-

Smyth) and atmospheric lighting (Stephen Kilroy) build the impression of late-Victorian absurdity.

This is good, barmy fun. The production will appeal to anyone who enjoyed 2010's *The Thirty-nine Steps*, needs a dose of midwinter mayhem or just likes a good laugh. It will play in Dunedin until September 5 and tour Otago and Southland from September 8-10.

[Hounds is Ast-Hounding](#)

[Dunedin Performance Journal,](#)  
13 Aug 2015

I must admit, arriving at The Fortune Theatre to see the opening night of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, I was in a state of anticipation. What little of the premise I had heard sounded fantastic and appeared to be right up my alley. I have to say, the show for the most part did not disappoint. The show is to say the least, shambolic. In the best possible way.

The audience steps into the theatre to see a number of columns at the rear of the stage, flanked by a couple of suitcases and a long wooden chest. On either side of these is a door and a chair. Each of these set elements are used extensively throughout the play, my particular favourite being the fireplace. The play opens with an address from the



actors, explaining that there has been a mix-up due to the fact that there are two productions of the same show running at the moment in New Zealand. One at the Fortune, and one at Circa in Wellington. From there the premise is set up for the three remaining actors to valiantly continue on with show and endeavour to play the parts of all 37 characters themselves.

Firstly, the highlights. Well where better to start with a comedy than with the jokes. And boy, were there a lot. Puns, sexual innuendo, prop jokes, set jokes, physical humour, self-referential humour, you name it, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* has it. Even if a couple of jokes fall flat, there is always another one just around the corner that's coming at you with a completely different tact. What I find most rewarding with the play are the moments in which it is clear how even though the show appears as a shambles at times, clearly an incredible amount of skill and dedication is required to pull it off. I'll say no more than that the beginning of act two is an impressive feat indeed. Personally, some of the sexual innuendo feels a bit archaic and gets a bit dominating towards the end of Act 2, but this is a small blip in an otherwise very funny show.

I have to take my hat off to Actor/Director Patrick Davies. The work that he has put into the show has clearly paid off, and to direct and star in a show that requires such technical precision, skill and organisation is no mean feat. Davies begins the play as Sir Charles Baskerville before swiftly moving on to play the character of Dr. Mortimer and then Charles' Canadian Nephew, Henry Baskerville. Davies works particularly well with Simon Leary on stage, and their chemistry as Henry Baskerville and Dr. Watson is infectious. Simon Leary brings a wonderful over-dramatic element to the stage with his portrayal of Sherlock's lovable, yet somewhat dim sidekick. His skill and experience with comedic work is clearly seen as his delivery of jokes is nigh on impeccable. However the actor that truly makes this show what it is, is the wonderful Nick Dunbar. His portrayal of Sherlock and nine or so other characters speaks volumes for his skill as a comedian and actor. And just wait until you see him move. One of the few issues I had with the show was with the lack of female characters and their portrayal. Of course, it can't

be helped much with the original script being written in 1902, but it just didn't sit quite right with me.

I think the stage management also needs to be commended highly for their work. Some of the costume changes in the show must have reached light-speed, and I imagine that George Wallace and Jordan Dickson have a huge part to play in this, so kudos for you for making one hell of a slick show.

Overall, my night at *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was a fantastic one. And if the reactions of the audience were anything to go by, it's a show that will be enjoyed by a wide range of people. If you feel like some wonderfully witty (and some not so witty) humour, with a side of impressive technical elements, get yourself down to see *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. It's on until the 5th of September, with a Q&A on the 11th of August, so you've pretty much got no excuse not to go. Unless you hate fun. In which case, don't go.





# Quotes

*In this scene Nick has to play Cecile trying to warn Sir Henry as well as voicing Stapleton's lines from behind a fan.*

**CECILE:** Good evening, Sir Henry

**SIR HENRY:** Cecile. I mean, Miss Stapleton.

**CECILE:** Cecile.

**HENRY:** Cecile.

**CECILE:** (*loud*) Sir Henry, I have come to ask you for dinner tonight. (*Quiet*) Don't come.

**SIR HENRY:** What?

**CECILE:** (*loud*) My brother and I would be honoured if you can make it. (*Quiet*) Don't come. (*Loud.*) Tonight.

**SIR HENRY:** I don't understand.

**CECILE:** (*loud*) What's not to understand? Come to dinner. (*Quiet*) But don't come.

**SIR HENRY:** I understand. You're being coy.

**CECILE:** (*loud*) So, is that your final answer?

**SIR HENRY:** What is?

**CECILE:** (*quiet*) That you won't come? (*Loud*) Yes?

**SIR HENRY:** Seven o'clock?

**CECILE:** (*quiet*) No. (*Loud*) Yes. (*Quiet*) But if you do, be careful. Don't stray from the path, and bring a weapon.

**STAPLETON:** Cecile!

**CECILE:** (*loud*) I have to go. I will see you later. (*Fierce whisper*) But I won't. (*She runs off.*)

*Watson and Holmes argue over what they believe to be Sir Henry's corps.*

**HOLMES:** Watson, please! Don't question my methods. All you had to do was keep Sir Henry inside! That's all! (*kicks dummy*) you had! (*kicks dummy*) to do! (*kicks dummy*) (*Watson finally stands up to Holmes – furious*)

**WATSON:** (*shouting*): Look! It wasn't so easy! He was really headstrong....once. And everything was really confusing. And I was really hungry. I was trying my best! And anyway, what were you doing? You made me write you all those letters and then I find you here the whole time... dressed up as a flipping tramp!

**HOLMES:** A hermit, actually.

**WATSON:** Whatever. Just making fun of me. I don't understand!

**HOLMES:** Watson. From the moment Dr. Mortimer entered the room back in Baker Street, I knew I must be here.

**WATSON:** Just leave me alone.

**HOLMES:** But it was imperative that no one – not even you, my dear friend – suspected the great Sherlock Holmes was

keeping track of events. It was the only way I could tempt the villain to put a foot wrong.

**WATSON:** So I was just a decoy?

**HOLMES:** No, Watson! You were my torch. Your letters were my torch out there in the fog.

**WATSON:** You burnt them?

**HOLMES:** ...Yes. But only after I had read them. Without them, I would have been lost.

**WATSON:** Really?

**HOLMES:** Really lost. And cold. Much colder.

**WATSON:** I just feel like nothing compared to you.

**HOLMES:** You're not nothing Watson. You're my torch. (*Pause*)

**WATSON:** I love you Sherlock.

**HOLMES:** I know.

*Watson sees the light*

**HOLMES:** You see, the body out there on the moor wasn't Sir Henry at all – just as I thought.

**WATSON:** You didn't think that!

**SIR HENRY:** Body? Is there a stiff on the moor?

**HOLMES:** Yes, just there (*pointing to the dummy still on the stage*). And Watson thought it was you.

**SIR HENRY:** Me?

**HOLMES:** That's right. But it isn't, is it? So that's good, isn't it?

**SIR HENRY:** So who is it out on the moor?

**HOLMES:** It can only be Slasher Seldon.

**SIR HENRY:** Well, good riddance to him.

**HOLMES:** Sir Henry, Watson wrote to me saying he had seen you stripped to your briefs. I'm intrigued.

**SIR HENRY:** What are you insinuating?!

**HOLMES:** Nothing, but I suspect your clothes never surfaced.

**SIR HENRY:** No they didn't. What of it?

**HOLMES:** Nothing. It just settles a little matter in my mind.

(*WATSON suddenly sees the light.*)

**WATSON:** Mrs Barrymore! She must have taken your clothes to give to her brother Seldon, out on the moor! And the Hound picked up the scent because...it was trained to the scent...Of course – Sir Henry's missing shoe...the very shoe that was stolen from you in London! And we believe the owner of the dog to be Staple-

**HOLMES:** Bravo, bravo! (*Clapping and encouraging the audience to follow suit.*

WATSON beams with pride until...) Twaddle! Watson is talking total twaddle!